


Policy Subject:	Resource Parent Home Standards
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Supersedes:	SSA-CW #13-16 Resource Parent Home Study Process
Program Affected:	Placement and Permanency - Resource Homes

Legal Information & Purpose

The purpose of this policy directive is to clarify requirements in COMAR 07.02.25 and to incorporate additional requirements established in the Family First Prevention Services Act's (FFPSA) National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards.

The President signed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, Public Law (P.L.) 115-123 into law on February 9, 2018. P.L. 115-123 includes the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) in Division E, Title VII. Section 50731 of the FFPSA directs HHS to “identify reputable model licensing standards with respect to the licensing of foster family homes” (as defined in section 472(c)(1) of the Social Security Act (the Act)). In response to this directive, the Children’s Bureau issued the National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards in February 2019 to go into effect April 1, 2019.

Policy

Since 2009, the Department of Human Services, Social Services Administration (DHS/SSA) has utilized the Consortium for Children’s Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) as Maryland’s chosen home study model. This policy amends and further clarifies the procedures for completing the resource home study process when selecting and studying a family’s ability to parent and address the needs of children in placement as it relates to the FFPSA National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards, COMAR and the SAFE home study. The resource family home study process, SAFE, provides the Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) with the opportunity to assess a family’s potential for resource parenting, while allowing the prospective resource family to assess their own capacity to be resource parents.

Procedural Guidance

Resource Parent Home Eligibility

The below eligibility requirements are set forth by regulation and statute for the purpose of assessing resource parent’s ability to meet the needs of children in placement. When completing the resource home approval these minimum eligibility requirements must be documented and verified (See Documentation and Forms section of this policy for more information). Several of these requirements are “FFPSA New Model Standards Expansion” requirements and are labeled as such to highlight areas the LDSS must now complete as a part of the home study process.

A. A foster family home approval includes the following:

a. Family Characteristics/Dynamics:

- i. An applicant will be at least 21 years old (**COMAR 07.02.25.04.C**).
- ii. A resource family will have sufficient income and financial stability to provide reasonable living conditions for their own family group without depending upon the reimbursement for basic foster care. Applicants must have income or resources to make timely payments for shelter, food, utility costs, clothing, and other household expenses prior to the addition of a child or children in foster care (**COMAR 07.02.25.04.H**).
- iii. Applicants must be able to communicate with the child, the LDSS, health care providers, and other service providers. (**COMAR**

07.02.25.05; 07.02.25.08).

- iv. At least one applicant in the home must have functional literacy, such as having the ability to read medication labels. **(FFPSA Model Requirement Expansion).**

- b. **Physical and Mental Health:** All applicants must have recent (conducted within the prior 12 months) physical exams from a licensed health care professional that indicate that the applicants are capable of caring for an additional child or children. All household members must provide information on their physical and mental health history, including any history of drug or alcohol abuse or treatment. **(COMAR 07.02.25.04.D).**

- i. All household members must disclose current mental health and/or substance abuse issues, provide information on their physical and mental health history, including any history of drug or alcohol abuse or treatment. The SAFE home study questionnaires and interview process will require the applicants to disclose this information. All children who are household members must be up to date on immunizations consistent with the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (ACIP), and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), unless the immunization is contrary to the child's health as documented by a licensed health care professional. All household members who will be caregivers of infants must have an up-to-date pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine consistent with the recommendations of the ACIP, unless the immunization is contrary to the individual's health as documented by a licensed health care professional. All household members who will be caregivers of infants and children with special medical needs must have an up-to-date annual influenza vaccine consistent with the recommendations of the ACIP, unless the immunization is contrary to the individual's health as documented by a licensed health care professional. **(FFPSA Model Requirement Expansion)**
- ii. The LDSS may require further documentation and/or evaluation to determine the suitability of the home.

- c. **Background Checks:** As outlined in SSA Policy # 11-07, the applicant will also agree to and clear the following Maryland State clearances: Judiciary Case Search, Child Support, Sex Offender Registry, and Motor Vehicle Administration Driving Record report. In addition, the applicant will clear State and Federal criminal background checks and the Child Protective Service Clearance for Maryland and any state resided in the last 5 years **(COMAR 07.02.25.04E).**

Before a resource home may be approved, an applicant and all household members 18 years old and older will apply for a State and federal criminal background checks.

Once the resource home is approved, if any new members 18 years old or older join the household, or if any household members become 18 years old, they will apply for a criminal background check within 30 days of their 18th birthday or of moving into the household. The LDSS may not approve or continue to approve as a resource home any home in which an adult in the household has a felony conviction for:

- Child abuse or neglect;
- Spousal abuse;
- A crime against a child or children including child pornography;
- A crime of violence including rape, sexual assault, or homicide, but not including other physical assault or battery; or
- Human trafficking; or

In the 5 years before the date of the application, has a felony conviction involving:

- Physical assault;
- Battery; or
- A drug-related offense

The local director will review charges, investigations, convictions, or findings related to any other crimes of any household member, to determine:

- The possible effect on the applicants ability to execute the responsibilities of a resource parent;
- The ability of the LDSS to achieve its goals in providing services to children in care; and
- The possible effect on or the safety of children in care.

The LDSS director has the authority to deny, suspend, or revoke resource home approval, based on this review. If the review of the records reveals a pending child protective services investigation, a decision may not be made as to the use of the home until the investigation is complete. The LDSS may not approve or continue to approve as a resource home any home in which an individual has an indicated child abuse or neglect finding. An exception may not be made unless approval is given in writing by the local director.

d. Home Study: Applicants must complete an agency home study, which is a written comprehensive family assessment to include the following elements (**COMAR 07.02.25.06A-E**):

- i. At least one scheduled on-site visit to assess the home to ensure that it meets the state, tribal and/or local standards applicable to the safety and care of the home; at least one scheduled in home interview for each household member to observe family functioning and assess the family's capacity to meet the needs of a child or children in foster care; the LDSS has discretion on whether to interview or observe each household member based on his or her age and development; and
- ii. The applicant must provide three personal references that will attest to the capability of the applicant to care for the child. One of the references must be from a relative while the other two may be obtained from a non-relative. Two of the references must be done by the LDSS conducting a

face-to-face interview. (COMAR 07.02.25.06E(4)(b) (**FFPSA New Model Standard Expansion**))

The SAFE home study practitioners should utilize SAFE Desk Guide and training knowledge to appropriately evaluate and communicate with the family issues related to their readiness to provide foster care. It is also expected that supervisors provide support and approval of the practitioner's work. The Consortium for Children's website provides up-to-date tools and training for the LDSS to access (<http://www.safehomestudy.org/Home.aspx>).

B. Foster Family Home Health and Safety (COMAR 07.02.25.04.G)

- a. Living Space:** The home must be a house, mobile home, housing unit or apartment occupied by an individual or a family. The home must have: An adequate supply of safe drinking water (**COMAR 07.02.25.06.E**); A properly operating kitchen with a sink, refrigerator, stove, and oven; at least one toilet, sink and tub or shower in operating condition; heating and/or cooling as required by the geographic area, consistent with accepted community standards and in safe operating condition; and a working phone or access to a working phone in close walking proximity (COMAR 07.02.25.04G) (**FFPSA New Model Standard Expansion**).
- b. Condition of the Home:** The applicant's home, grounds, and all structures on the grounds of the property must be properly maintained in a clean, safe, and sanitary condition and in a reasonable state of repair within community standards. The interior and exterior must be free from dangerous objects and conditions, and from hazardous materials. The home must meet the following requirements (**COMAR 07.02.25.04 G**):

 - i. Have adequate lighting, ventilation and proper trash and recycling disposal, if recycling is available;
 - ii. Be free from rodents and insect infestation;
 - iii. Proper water heater temperature;
 - iv. Weapons and ammunition (separately) stored, locked, unloaded, and inaccessible to children;
 - v. Pets are vaccinated in accordance with state, tribal and/or local law (**COMAR 07.02.25.04.K**);
 - vi. Have conditions that prevent the child's access, as appropriate for his or her age and development, to all medications, poisonous materials, cleaning supplies, other hazardous materials, and alcoholic beverages;
 - vii. Pass a health department inspection that includes a lead paint and dust inspection, reviews the safeguarding of prescription and household chemicals, and meeting of the window covering standards and fossil fuel standards;

- vii. Swimming pools, hot tubs, and spas must meet the following to ensure they are safe and hazard free (and additionally must meet all state, tribal and/or local safety requirements)(COMAR 07.02.25.04M) (**FFPSA New Model Home Standards**):
1. Swimming pools must have a barrier on all sides.
 2. Swimming pools must have their methods of access through the barrier equipped with a safety device, such as a bolt lock.
 3. Swimming pools must be equipped with a life saving device, such as a ring buoy.
 4. If the swimming pool cannot be emptied after each use, the pool must have a working pump and filtering system.
 5. Hot tubs and spas must have safety covers that are locked when not in use.

C. Foster Family Home Capacity: The total number of children in foster care in a foster family home must not exceed six consistent with section 472(c)(1)(A)(ii)(III) of the Act. Per section 472(c)(1)(B) of the Act and COMAR (**COMAR 07.02.25.13.A(5)(6)(7), COMAR 07.02.25.13.D**)).

The number of foster children cared for in a foster family home may exceed this numerical limitation at the option of the LDSS for any of the following reasons: To allow a parenting youth in foster care to remain with the child of the parenting youth; to allow siblings to remain together; to allow a child with an established meaningful relationship with the family to remain with the family; and to allow a family with special training or skills to provide care to a child who has a severe disability.

D. Foster Family Home Sleeping Arrangements: Applicants must provide a safe sleeping space including sleeping supplies, such as a mattress and linens, for each individual child, as appropriate for the child's needs and age and similar to other household members. Foster parents must not co-sleep or bed-share with infants. (**COMAR 07.02.25.04.J(4), COMAR 07.02.25.04.J(2)**)

E. Emergency Preparedness, Fire Safety, and Evacuation Plans: All resource homes must have fire, safety, and evacuation plans and adhere to the following requirements (**COMAR 07.02.25.04.G, 07.02.25.04.I, FFPSA New Model Foster Home Standards**):

The applicant must have emergency preparedness plans and items in place as appropriate for the home's geographic location. The applicant's home must meet the following fire safety and emergency planning requirements: at least one smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector on each level of occupancy of the home and one near all sleeping areas; one operable fire extinguisher that is readily accessible, the home must be free of obvious fire hazards, such as defective heating equipment or improperly stored flammable materials; contain a written emergency evacuation plan to be reviewed with the child and posted in a prominent place in the

home; maintain a comprehensive list of emergency telephone numbers, including poison control, and post those numbers in a prominent place in the home; and maintain first aid supplies.

F. Transportation: Applicants must ensure that the family has reliable, legal and safe transportation (COMAR 07.02.25.04L) (**FFPSA New Model Home Standards**).

Reliable transportation includes a properly maintained vehicle or access to reliable public transportation; if a privately-owned vehicle owned by the applicant's family or friends is used to transport the child in foster care, legal transportation includes having a valid driving license, insurance and registration; and safe transportation includes safety restraints as appropriate for the child.

G. Training: Pre-service training requirements (27 hours) and In-service training requirements (10 hours per year) (**COMAR 07.02.25.14**).

It is required that all prospective resource parent applicants complete a 27 hour PRIDE pre-service training. The initial 3 hour Informational meeting may be counted toward the required 27 hours of pre-service training. The PRIDE pre-service training is designed to prepare resource parents to manage such things as the impact of childhood trauma, building positive relationships with the birth family, assisting with visitation, assisting with medical, dental and psychological care, providing clothing and toiletry needs. The prospective resource parent will develop the competency and skill to problem solve, become a member of a professional team, practice legal and ethical standards, the rights, roles, responsibilities and expectations of resource parents, agency structure, purpose, policies, and services; laws and regulations. Attendance is mandatory.

Resource parents must participate in ongoing training to receive instruction to support their parental roles and ensure the parent is up to date with agency requirements. The in-service hour requirement is 10 hours per reconsideration year. Two hours of in-service behavioral management training are to be completed every other year. Training must also consist of first aid (including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and medication administration.

H. Alternative Supervision: According to the regulations, the resource parent will comply with the requirements for alternative plans for supervision (**COMAR 07.02.25.05.C**).

An alternative plan for supervision of children while the resource parent is employed or at school will be approved by the LDSS. The alternative child care provider will be licensed by the Maryland Office of Child Care or any agency that complies with the standards of the Maryland Office of Child Care. The alternative child care provider will have a criminal background and a child protective services background check. LDSS approval is required for all other reasons, that a resource parent might request alternative child care.

I. Foster Parent Assurances: Applicants must agree to comply with their roles and responsibilities as discussed with LDSS during the home study and training process and once a child is placed in their care. The LDSS must require assurances including:

- a. Applicants will not use corporal or degrading punishment. (COMAR 07.02.25.20D)

- b. Applicants will not use any illegal substances, abuse alcohol by consuming it in excess amounts, or abuse legal prescription and/or nonprescription drugs by consuming them in excess amounts or using them contrary to as indicated (**FFPSA New Model Home Standards**).
- c. Applicants and their guests will not smoke in the foster family home, in any vehicle used to transport the child, or in the presence of the child in foster care (**COMAR 07.02.25.08.A(16)**).
- d. Applicants will adhere to the LDSS's reasonable and prudent parent standard per section 472(c)(1)(A)(ii)(I) of the Act. (SSA Policy #16-17 Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard).

Alignment with Practice Model and Desired Outcomes

This policy aligns with the DHS/SSA's Integrated Practice Model in that it guides the LDSS to practice using a thorough and thoughtful process that values placing children in family homes that are safe and can nurture the child's well-being and assist with timely and lasting permanency. Resource homes staff is provided with the tools they need for direct and clear communication with prospective resource families as they consider and are considered as a resource.

Documentation

The below forms provide a verification that the home study assessment, eligibility requirements and communication with prospective resource parents around their assurances have been followed and completed. This information should be documented in CHESSIE/CJAMS and, where applicable supporting documentation should be uploaded into the system.

Forms

- Resource Parent Application
- SAFE Home Study:
 - Questionnaire I
 - SAFE Questionnaire II
 - SAFE home study narrative
- Applicant/Child Medical Forms
- Home/Health Inspection
- Resource Parent Agreement